

The News This Week: New Census, Who Dis?

Puerto Rico death toll numbers, world news update, states suing the census bureau, and fake news quiz.



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Posted on June 2, 2018, at 5:01 a.m. ET

In this week's episode:

- World news editor Miriam Elder chats with deputy world editor Hayes Brown about the news that happened around the world this week: Brazil's gas shortage, Ireland's abortion referendum, and the mysterious story of the Ukrainian journalist who came back from the dead.
- Breaking news reporter Talal Ansari interviews reporter Nidhi Prakash about her time reporting on Puerto Rico over the last year as another hurricane season begins.
- Data reporter Lam Thuy Vo explains the latest data drama surrounding the census to her boss, Tom Namako.
- Host Julia Furlan takes the weekly fake news quiz with Jane Lytvynenko.

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What in the World - 00:54

JF: There are a lot of countries in the world, and there is a lot going on in all of them. So we have What in the World, which is where our world news editor Miriam Elder makes sense of it all for us. This week she's putting deputy world editor Hayes Brown in the hot seat.

Miriam Elder: Hi, Hayes.

Hayes Brown: Hi, boss.

ME: So what we're gonna do is I'm going to play clips from the week in news, and you have to identify what on earth is going on, and give me a snappy five-word headline to explain it all.

HB: That sounds not at all daunting.

ME: So you're ready.

HB: No. 100% not ready for this.

ME: Here we go.

CLIP: *We are not only here for the truck drivers, but for all Brazilians who are suffering with the rises in electricity, water, gas, everything! Brazilians have to work just to survive. We are not members of any political party; we are the people who are suffering the most.*

HB: Oh man, OK. Five words for this, um ... Brazil's fuel costs too high? Ahh that's five, but it's bad. It's a bad five. Brazil truckers fuel rage bad. Ahh this is harder than you would think!

ME: OK why don't you give us a sentence then. What the hell's going on in Brazil?

HB: So, Brazil's truckers have been on strike for over a week now because fuel costs are just too damn high. And while they have come to some agreements with the government, they are still asking for more.

ME: Alright, great.

HB: No! That was not great! I want retribution. Give me the next one.

ME: How about "Brazil truckers protest over fuel"?

HB: Wow. Sure! If you want to make it simple and clean, I guess.

ME: Alright, moving right along. Here is number two.

CLIP: First of all the people have spoken, and they are saying that this is a country in which we trust women and respect their choices. Thank you so much for making today possible.

HB: Ireland says some abortions now is a five-word way of describing that.

ME: So, last weekend, Ireland approved basically repealing this ban on abortion. So this was a huge move for Ireland, and I'm curious, how does it play into everything that's going on in the world in this global feminist moment that it feels like we're living through?

HB: So I think that this is both very much of the time and also the continuation of something that's been going on in Ireland at least for the last six years. Six years ago, an Indian woman who was pregnant

tried to get an abortion but was unable to because of Ireland's restrictive laws at the time, and she wound up dying because of medical complications. Since then we've seen, in Ireland, the election of an LGBT prime minister, we've seen them pass same-sex marriage, and now this. And I think that's really a sign of Ireland moving away from their traditional Catholic mores to being more in step with this global trend toward feminism and women's rights that we're seeing play out, especially throughout western Europe.

ME: Thanks Hayes, that makes a lot of sense.

HB: I try.

ME: You're one for two. So you have a chance of redemption with number three. Here we go.

CLIP: *The head of the SBU Vasyl Hrytsak, he put out a statement on the official SBU Facebook page saying, "I could've expressed condolences to Arkady Babchenko's family, but I will not do it. On the contrary, today I congratulate Arkady on the third birthday, and invite him to this hall," obviously indicating that he was there.*

HB: Alright, five words: Arkady, like Paul, wasn't dead. Oh! Beatles reference!

ME: So this is about the Ukrainian journalist who faked his own death in concert with the Ukrainian security services in order to catch people who were allegedly organizing to kill him. Is that right?

HB: That is correct, you got it all in there. This was probably the wildest international story on what was already an already wild day. It was so baffling to suddenly see this dude pop up at a press conference.

ME: So it seems like a lot of people were pissed off, they felt like they were tricked, but did this whole scheme achieve what it actually

wanted to?

HB: I mean yes and no? On the one hand, it sounds like they caught the would-be assassin, which, in theory is why they set this all up. On the other hand, thinking two steps down the board, it is a huge opening for Russia to call every future assassination just a trick by the Ukrainian police, which I believe is your take on things.

ME: Why thank you, I like hearing my take on things. Alright, Hayes, well that is two out of three, it's good, it's not great, but it's good. It's a good start.

JF: That was Miriam Elder talking to Hayes Brown.

If you're thinking to yourself, wow I should really follow these people around the internet so I can be both more informed and have more wordplay in my life.

Text JoJo the word ""WHOMST"" -- that's W-H-O-M-S-T -- And once you do, JoJo will send you a list of everyone who appears on this week's episode.

Up Close - 6:24

Julia Furlan: A study released this week reveals that nearly 6,000 people died in Puerto Rico because of Hurricane Maria. As another hurricane season begins, this is Up Close, where we bring you a story that deserves a closer look. Here's breaking news reporter Talal Ansari with Nidhi Prakash, who's been on the ground covering this story for nearly a year.

Talal Ansari: Nidhi, take me back to your trip to Puerto Rico that you took in October of last year.

Nidhi Prakash: I arrived there about two weeks after the hurricane. And I remember driving around the island, after sunset it would be pitch black at night, there was no cell reception, people were drinking out of mountain springs because there wasn't a stable water supply in many areas. But really what struck me was that I kept hearing from people in various towns that they knew of relatives or other people in their community or the next community over, who had died, who were not being counted in the official death toll. That they had died for reasons like, their dialysis machine at home not working for lack of power, or there were a lot of people with diabetes who couldn't store their medication in refrigerators, things like that.

And so, basically, given that we couldn't call ahead and make inquiries about these things, I decided to just go where dead people end up I guess, which is funeral homes and crematoriums. I was talking to a waitress at a restaurant on the other side of the island and she told me that in her hometown, she'd received word from her mother somehow that there were a few dozen people who had died immediately after the hurricane that were not counted in the death toll. So with that in mind, I set out to go to those towns, Utuado and Jayuya, and just to kind of ask around in the towns but also go directly to the funeral homes.

So in one of the funeral homes in Jayuya, I was talking to a funeral director, and he was telling me about all of the people who had come through and died of hurricane-related causes. And then he said, 'Actually, you know there's a young man who's here right now having a funeral for his father who died because his tank of oxygen ran out of supplies and also they had erratic power.'

So, I walked into one of the chapels in the funeral home and Hernan Alvarez was there receiving guests for his father, and he was kind enough to talk to me a little bit about what they had been through.

They were in a home for elderly people when the storm hit. His father

depended on a ventilator and an oxygen tank to survive, and he said that the building had a generator but that it only had enough power to basically light up the building from the outside. So the elevators and all of the outlets inside the building weren't working. And he actually went off the oxygen, and it seemed like he was holding his father in his arms and it seemed like he was going to die.

He was alone with his father, and because of the lack of cell reception, they also couldn't call for help. In a situation with that, you would imagine ...

TA: Right, it's the first thing you'd do.

NP: We would all imagine calling 9-1-1 right? Straight away. So that was not an option at all for him. Later on, the situation just continued to be so bad that he couldn't save him.

TA: And is it safe to assume that this man is not included in the death toll for the hurricane?

NP: He wasn't then, and he's still not now.

TA: A bunch of researchers got together from Harvard and they found that there was 5,740 deaths in Puerto Rico in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria. That's 70 times the official number and higher than the attacks of September 11th and Hurricane Katrina combined. So, how did we get to two very different numbers, one given by the government, and one by this Harvard study?

NP: Basically, what's happened here is that the government's death toll from very early on was not really being conducted in a very methodical way. So even very early on when President Trump visited, and that was in October, the official death toll was 16 and that's something that he touted at the time as being a signal of how well the situation was going down there, and how it wasn't a real catastrophe like Katrina. So

there's been a lot of attention on this from way back then. But in terms of the death toll, it was 16 officially then. After a little bit of pressure, the government gradually started paying some attention to it. In December, they upped it to 64, and they haven't updated it since then. In February, the governor of Puerto Rico, Ricardo Rossello, said that he was commissioning an independent study into the death toll.

TAPE: I think that it's important for those who have lost loved ones and everybody involved in Puerto Rico know exactly or close to the exact number of what the number of deaths was ...

NP: For months and months and months, reporters like myself were putting out reports that they were undercounting how many people were dying. And so basically there's been a lot of scrutiny on this since the very beginning, and that's what's led this independent group at Harvard, and there were some researchers on the ground in Puerto Rico as well, to look into it and they basically conducted a survey on the ground, and that's how they came up with this new number of 5,740.

TA: And in a practical sense, why does it matter whether this number is accurate or not?

NP: So I think that there are two answers to that. I think the first one is the kind of human impact of it. And obviously, if we're talking about thousands of families who have lost a loved one, it's going to matter to them how that was counted and whether or not there's an acknowledgment that they might've died because they didn't have access to medical care that they should have had. And I think on the other side of it, it's something that is really essential for planning for other hurricane seasons, which Puerto Rico is now entering. And without an understanding of where people died and how they died, it's really hard to kind of make plans to look after the most vulnerable people.

TA: Can you explain to me how does 5,000 die and it not go counted?

NP: So I think the thing to know to begin with is that there is no national standard in the US for how deaths are counted after a disaster like this. So that's the kind of baseline problem. But then given the situation we had in Puerto Rico, basically when I was out there, I was hearing from people in towns and really remote areas that they had family members, that they knew people in their communities who had died and it wasn't being recorded, and what they said to me there was that no one had told them what to classify as a hurricane death or not. And so that is where the real breakdown in the system seems to have come from, I think.

TA: Now here we are, hurricane season just started yesterday, and it's expected to be as bad as last year's. Is Puerto Rico ready for any type of storm?

NP: You know Talal, it seems like it's not. Some things are better than they were last year. But the recuperation from Maria's still not over. And as much as the government has put in new initiatives in a bunch of different areas, having the new warehouses, that kind of thing, I think that their attitude towards this death count from the very beginning has been a little negligent. The first couple of times that I reached out to them about this from October through November, they denied that there was any kind of problem in the way that they were conducting the death count. It's difficult to see how you can be prepared without having taken stock of what happened.

JF: That was breaking news reporters Talal Ansari and Nhidi Prakash.

Data with a Heartbeat - 14:16

JF: There's a question on the census this year that is freaking people out, because it's never been asked before. This is Data With a

Heartbeat, where reporter Lam Thuy Vo brings a little bit of humanity to the numbers that describe us.

TAPE:

Lam Thuy Vo: Is this a citizen of the United States; how do you feel about that question?

Roommate: I...even though I do have the citizenship as of today, I never felt a citizen of the United States, and I don't think that's going to change.

LTV: Tom, what you just heard was my roommate and me filling out the American community survey. It's done by the Census Bureau, but it's a survey that is put out by the Census every few years to get an estimate for how many people live in the U.S. and what they do and how they live and how much money they make, etc. While the census is the actual count that is being used. And the question you just heard--the question about citizenship--is the thing that has caused a whole lot of drama in the world of data recently.

Tom Namako: Ah! So data drama, this is exactly what every editor wants to hear about. Not Pusha T and Drake, not the Russian journalist who resurrected from the dead; what we want to hear about is data drama. Seriously, what is going on here Lam.

LTV: Okay, so there's this question about citizenship that hasn't been in the census since 1950. And that was kind of like, put in there last minute sometime in March. And since then people have erupted in like, outrage about this. A bunch of people basically have started suing the Census Bureau and the Department of Commerce. First, there was New York State, which led a group of 18 states, and then 15 cities, a handful of counties, and the U.S. Conference of Mayors to sue the Census Bureau and to tell them to take out the citizenship question. And now, just on May 22nd, the state of Alabama and the Alabama

Attorney General Steve Marshall filed a lawsuit against the Census Bureau because they were counting undocumented immigrants.

TAPE: The state of Alabama and I have filed suit in federal district court for the Northern District of Alabama, against the United States Department of Commerce, and the Bureau of the Census, to require them to exclude illegal aliens when they conduct the 2020 census.

So now we have this whole party, right? People just suing the census left and right!

TN: So the census to me is something that you learn about in like social studies class in elementary school. It's this, I think people might of as like a boring thing where it's like, "here's how many people are in the country! Thank you good night!" Right? But what I'm really curious about is what the actionable thing is here? What impact does this census question have that has everybody so up in arms?

LTV: So there's two sides to this, right? First, the census numbers are used to redistribute seats in the house of representatives. And to draw legislative districts. So there's gerrymandered districts, right, the ones that look all funky and are like bendy and stuff. Those are based on census numbers.

TN: So what about the everyday impacts of this?

LTV: Census numbers are also used to help distribute federal funds. So if you have a neighborhood that is in dire need of more lunch money, for example, for underprivileged kids, you would use census numbers to determine where that money should go and how much money that particular neighborhood should get.

TN: So Lam when we started off here you were talking about two different lawsuits, and one of them was in Alabama and it seems to deal with the idea that they are worried about losing electoral power

because of all of this. Is their claim valid?

LTV: See it's complicated because you do want to count everyone who is in the country because in some places undocumented people make up the basis of all of these cities, right. Like a lot of undocumented immigrants make up the fabric of a lot of these cities that employ them. On the other hand I guess it does make some sense, right?. Los Angeles for example is considered one of the largest homes for undocumented immigrants. If they get a larger you know representation in government due to people counting undocumented immigrants, that's a fair-ish claim, but I don't think that not counting them is a good solution either. And so I think we're opening up this whole questioning of who is allowed to be a part of this nation, on paper, in data, and that has like cut to the core of the tensions that we're feeling across the U.S. right now.

JF: That was data reporter Lam Thuy Vo talking to Breaking News Editor Tom Namako.

Fake News Quiz - 19:29

JF: There's a universe of bullshit out there, which is why we're here to help you sort it out. It's time for Fake News You Can Use, where Jane Lytvynenko makes sure that you're not falling for it by making me take a quiz.

JF: Jane Lytvynenko, the first mate on the submarine that wades into the Fake News Ocean of the internet--wow this is, this is quite the metaphor--Jane how you doing?

Jane Lytvynenko: You know, there's definitely a ton of garbage patches floating around, it's great. Alright, so I have three stories for you this week, like always.

JF: Okay.

JL: And this first one is actually pretty serious. It is these images of children lying down on what looks to be green mats in essentially a cage. And there are a few different photos some of them are covered by you know shiny blankets. And so essentially the question that I have for you is the photos in this article show the glimpse of immigrant children at a Trump holding facility. Do you think that that's true or fake?

JF: Uhm, I actually read about the image that you're talking about. So I'm going to say that this is a real image but it is not actually from this week as people were circulating, it's from 2014. Is that correct?

JL: Yes that's exactly right, So this is a 2014 series of photographs published by AZ Central which is a USA Network website.

JF: Shout out to local news.

JL: Shout out to local news. There's no reason to believe that the conditions are currently any better, but a lot of people did share this with a very strong Anti-Trump sentiment and sort of used this as proof that things in America are really bad and, sorry Americans, no indication that things have gotten better. But this is from 2014.

JF: Right.

JL: So the second question I have for you is about Roseanne the TV show, the noted TV show: "Fox has announced they will pick up Roseanne after ABC has canceled it." And of course this is for the racist tweet that the star of the show tweeted. Do you think that's real or that's fake?

JF: I... Okay, I want to say... Oh man, this one's hard. I think that it's fake because I think that it's the kind of thing that a liberal conspiracy

theory would want to spread, that Fox News is so far right that they would pick up the show that a big network put down after the star of the show revealed herself once again to be racist and bigoted. So I'm going to say it's fake.

JL: You're correct! That's two for two.

JF: Whoa! Oh my goodness I'm doing so well! Look at me!

JL: I know, crazy! So, this is actually part of a series. There were a series of articles just essentially inserting different TV networks saying that they picked up Roseanne or saved Roseanne or hired Roseanne. This was including NBC, Fox News... but it is fake. This particular headline comes from a satirical article. So according to this social measurement tool we have it got over 300,000 likes, shares, and comments.

JF: Oh wow.

JL: But it does label itself as satire, so some people fell for it and some people shared it in jest.

JF: It seems like they don't understand what satire is, which is not just lies; it's commentary, right?

JL: Just lies is not satire.

JF: No

JL: Alright so, this is my funnest one that I could find for you this week.

JF: Okay

JL: A parrot learned how to control Alexa, the virtual assistant. Is that true or false?

JF: Okay I'm gonna say this is true because one time I read a story, a

nonfiction reported true story, about a parrot who was a witness to a murder, and then I went down a deep rabbit hole of--or a parrot hole, if you will--of birds who are smart enough to get involved in the legal justice system. And therefore I will say that the parrot controlling Alexa is real.

JL: Alright well the parrot that you read about and this one must be birds of a feather, because you are correct!

JF: Yay!

JL: It is real; this one little joy that we have in life. There is a parrot called Petra, and it's learned how to turn the lights on and off, and it has been tormenting its owner by just telling Alexa to turn the lights on and turn the lights off.

JF: Oh my goodness gracious I love it! I'm so happy. Petra, this podcast is dedicated to you this week.

JL: Petra, you are soaring real high my friend, real high.

JF: Oh my god, Jane!

JL: I can't help myself.

JF: Light flex; I'm three for three I can identify fake news! So what's the tip that you brought us Jane?

JL: First of all congratulations to you, from me and the Alexa controlling parrot.

JF: Thank you, thank you, and thanks to Petra as well.

JL: And the tip I have this week is to look at the date when something has been published. Whether it's a video or a photo or an article, sometimes it can be a little bit difficult to find, but it is very very

common for something to go viral as if it's new again, when really it's from a few years ago. And we see this a lot with tweets especially, a lot of tweets get stolen and reposted. So when you browse the internet, when you click on something, first of all: actually read it.

JF: Cool cool seems good read the Internet

JL: Look up the date when it was published to prevent yourself from some embarrassment. There's plenty of things to be angry about; it's more productive to be angry about new things rather than old ones.

JF: Yeah there's plenty of rage, you just gotta find the right stuff to be mad about, because it's true.

That was Jane Lytvynenko, reporter and Fake News Sleuth. If you want to test your own ability to spot fake news, just text JoJo the word "quiz." Again, their number is 929-236-9577.

And that's our show for the week! Thank you so much for listening. If you like what you heard, please pretty please rate and review us in Apple Podcasts and give us all the stars! It'll help more people find us and enjoy the show, too. And if you're out in the world, I want you to do something: turn to the person next to you and tell them: wow I love this new podcast I just heard, it's soooo great!

And don't forget, if you text JoJo the word "WHOMST," you can get a list of everyone in this week's episode, AND their twitter handles.

This show was produced by the PoooodSquad! That's Megan Detrie, Alex Laughlin, Camila Salazar, and me -- Julia Furlan. Our boss is Cindy Vanegas-Gesuale and our music is by Chad Crouch. If you're ever in lovely Ontario and need to find a studio, head to Vocal Fry studios where Jane records her end of the fake news quiz.

And special thank you to JoJo, who, fun fact: was totally robbed by the casting director of Robocop.

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TOPICS IN THIS ARTICLE

Fake News



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